

# The Ombuds Office 2013-2014 Annual Report

**UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO**

**July 1, 2013 – June 30, 2014**

PREPARED BY  
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OMBUDS

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## Acknowledgements

Change and transition were the hallmark of the university during 2013-2014. In May 2013, Provost and Executive Vice President Doug Baker left the university to assume the presidency of Northern Illinois University, and College of Letters, Arts and Social Sciences Dean Katherine Aiken was appointed interim provost and executive vice president. Shortly thereafter, President M. Duane Nellis also left the university to become president of Texas Tech University, and in early June, former College of Law Dean Donald Burnett took office as interim president. The Board announced the permanent appointment of President Chuck Staben in November 2013, and President Staben took office in March 2014.

While new leadership was settling into the new 2013-14 fiscal year, two university-wide initiatives were also underway -- a university-wide review of programs and functions mandated by the State Board of Education, called Focus for the Future, and a new employee classification system was announced, revised and implemented.

Change is not surprising nor unusual in university life; and the University of Idaho has encountered its share in recent years. As the university moved through the transitions of 2013-14, and despite the challenges that can accompany co-occurring changes in leadership and major changes in systems, there were countless examples of continuing commitment and expressions of good will from across the university.

I want to extend my appreciation to former Interim President Donald Burnett for his commitment to and support of the independence, neutrality, informality and confidentiality of the ombuds role, the ombuds and the problem resolution process. This commitment demonstrated great respect for those who sought assistance through the Ombuds Office. I also want to acknowledge the support of the Ombuds Office by President Staben since his arrival on campus.

Additionally, I thank administrators, faculty, staff and students from across all colleges and divisions for their continuing commitment to sustaining a safe and respectful workplace and learning community. These commitments, together with their trust, cooperation and constructive efforts contributed to the successful resolution of many challenging issues throughout the year.

# The Ombuds Office 2013-2014 Annual Report

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## UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO

### History of the University of Idaho Ombuds Office

The Ombuds Office at the University of Idaho is now in its twenty-second year of service. The first University of Idaho ombudsman office was created in 1992 by President Elizabeth Zinser and operated under the title of Office of Faculty Ombudsman. The office was originally staffed by a half-time faculty member whose sole charge was to serve the faculty. In response to a growing need for staff ombudsman services, Carol Hahn was appointed interim staff ombudsman in 1994, and served for one year. The following year, the faculty ombudsman's services were formally expanded to include staff. As the case load increased, President Robert Hoover approved the addition of a half-time, non-faculty assistant ombudsman, and Roxanne "Ellen" Schreiber was appointed to the position in 1998.

The University of Idaho Ombudsman Office and the role of the ombudsman continued to evolve over the next decade. In 2000, to more accurately reflect the role and responsibilities of the position, the original title of assistant ombudsman was changed to associate ombudsman. This title was further modified in 2009, once again to more accurately reflect the role and responsibilities of the position, and the designation of associate was eliminated from the job title. In 2005, in keeping with a growing national trend to emphasize the gender neutrality of the office and ombuds position, the Faculty Senate approved a request to change the office name and position titles to Ombuds Office and ombuds. In spring 2009, and consistent with most university ombuds offices across the nation, the Ombuds Office expanded its services to include both undergraduate and graduate students. In January 2010, upon the retirement of then co-Ombuds James Fazio, Ombuds R. Ellen Schreiber was assigned to the Ombuds Office on a full time basis, thus becoming the university's first full time ombuds.

University of Idaho Ombuds 1992-present:

- David J. Walker, Dept. of Agricultural Economics/Rural Sociology, 1992-1999
- Thomas V. Trotter, Dept. of Counseling and School Psychology, Special Education, and Educational Leadership, 1999-2003
- Charles Morrison, Counseling and Testing Center, 2003-2005
- James R. Fazio, Dept. of Conservation Social Sciences, 2006-2009
- Roxanne "Ellen" Schreiber, 1998-present

### Mission, Purpose and Function

The University of Idaho Ombuds Office' mission is to support a positive and productive working, learning and living environment for faculty, staff and students by promoting mutual respect, ensuring fairness and resolving problems that emerge within the university. The primary purpose of the Ombuds Office is to resolve problems or conflicts informally and at the lowest possible level by providing a safe place where employees and students can speak confidentially and candidly about their issues of concern and receive assistance in identifying and applying options to address them. The office also serves as an agent of positive change by helping to prevent problems by identifying issues of concern, and by providing timely feedback.

The Ombuds Office' mission and purpose are accomplished by the following:

- listening to concerns non-judgmentally
- analyzing problems and exploring possible response options
- providing information about policies and services
- providing individual and group/unit conflict coaching
- facilitating dialogue between individuals and groups
- mediating disputes
- providing leadership consultation
- referring to campus and community resources
- coordinating with other university offices
- providing training in human relations, communication and conflict resolution
- noting trends and impacts
- bringing systemic problems to the forefront
- recommending changes in policy, processes and/or procedures

In fulfilling its purpose, the Ombuds Office adheres to and operates by the Standards of Practice and the Code of Ethics established by the International Ombudsman Association and the following tenets:

**Independence.** To ensure objectivity, the office operates independent of all university entities and reports to the highest possible level of the organization.

**Confidentiality.** All contacts, conversations and information exchanged with the ombuds remain confidential and are not disclosed without the consent of all parties involved *and* the ombuds. Limits to confidentiality exist when disclosure is necessary to protect someone from imminent harm and when otherwise required by law.

**Neutrality and Impartiality.** An ombuds is a designated neutral on behalf of all members of the university community. As such, the ombuds remains impartial and unaligned. An ombuds does not take sides, represent or advocate on behalf of any party or the university. Rather, it is the role of the ombuds to consider the facts, rights, interests, and safety of all parties involved in a search for a fair resolution to a problem. An ombuds promotes and advocates only for fairness and justice.

**Informality.** Consultations are conducted 'off the record' and *do not constitute notice to the university* in any way. No personal information is retained or used for subsequent formal proceedings. An ombuds will not serve as a witness nor offer testimony in any formal proceeding unless required by law. Although the process is informal, individuals using the services of the Ombuds Office retain their rights to all formal procedures ordinarily available to them.

## Year in Review

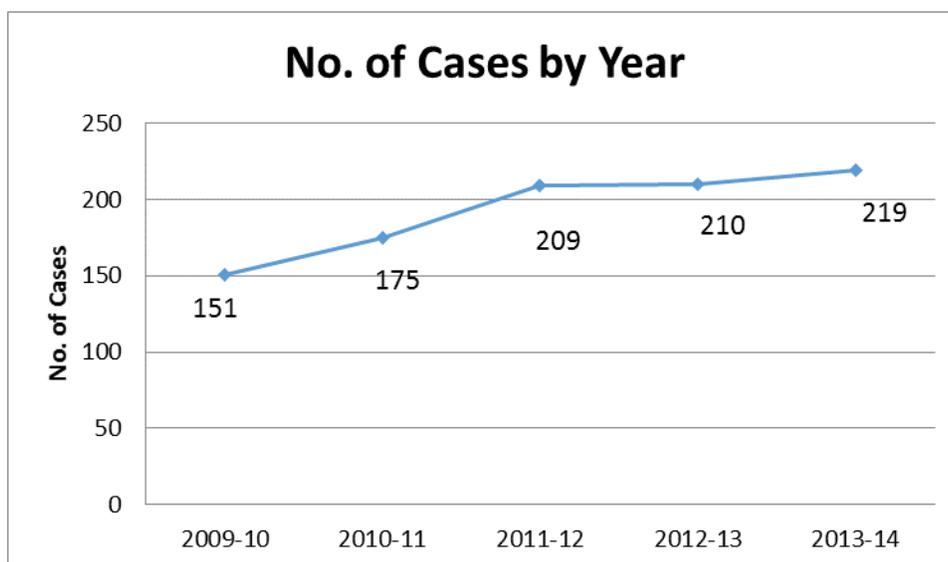
While the university was in considerable transition and underwent a number of significant changes during FY 2013-14, it was a year of stability for the Ombuds Office. Staffing, facilities and services remained unchanged, and visitors continued to access ombuds' services in numbers comparable to previous years.

**Staffing.** The Ombuds Office was staffed by a full time professional ombuds. Ombuds R. Ellen Schreiber has served as a university ombuds for 16 years and is an experienced mediator, facilitator and trainer. Services were available throughout the year to all university employees and students statewide during regular business hours and offered during extended hours, whenever necessary to accommodate work shifts and special needs. The assistant to the faculty secretary provided part time administrative assistance.

**Facilities.** Ombuds Office facilities include a private office and a small, adjacent waiting room. Both spaces are adequately furnished. The adjacent large meeting room was renovated and reopened as the new Carol

R. Brink Faculty and Staff Lounge. Special measures to ensure confidentiality and privacy for the Ombuds Office were included in the renovation. These measures, which included the construction of a secondary wall along the common wall, added sound-proofing, and installation of a sound resistant, self-closing door, successfully addressed all concerns. No complaints regarding privacy or confidentiality were received following the renovation.

**Case Load.** For the purpose of reporting, a ‘case’ is any new or recurrent issue (after a previous case closure) that is brought to the ombuds’ attention by one or more individuals seeking assistance. It can also be an issue of which an ombuds becomes aware and takes ombuds-initiated action. Cases vary from a single informational visit to highly complex interventions involving multiple parties and meetings, and requiring considerable time. The Ombuds Office addressed 219 cases in 2013-14, an increase of nine cases over the previous year (Figure 1). The total number of cases reported in any year is always a conservative figure since numerous contacts occur informally and spontaneously in the course of doing ombuds business, such as during informational sessions, training workshops, and as the result of periodic unit visits across the university statewide. While some of these encounters do result in case entries, others are part of the ombuds’ routine function and are not counted.



**Figure 1: Total number of ombuds cases by year.**

Similar to previous years, the number of new cases by month fluctuated modestly across the months of the year. August, October and March had the highest numbers of new cases for the year. The increased number of cases in August was due to the roll out of the new employee classification system; while no exceptional issues were noted for the larger number of cases in October. March numbers continued to coincide with the completion of the annual performance evaluation period and subsequent employment actions, such as the beginning of nonrenewal decisions which continued into May. As in the previous year, the lowest number of new cases occurred in January, with 10 new cases (Figure 2).

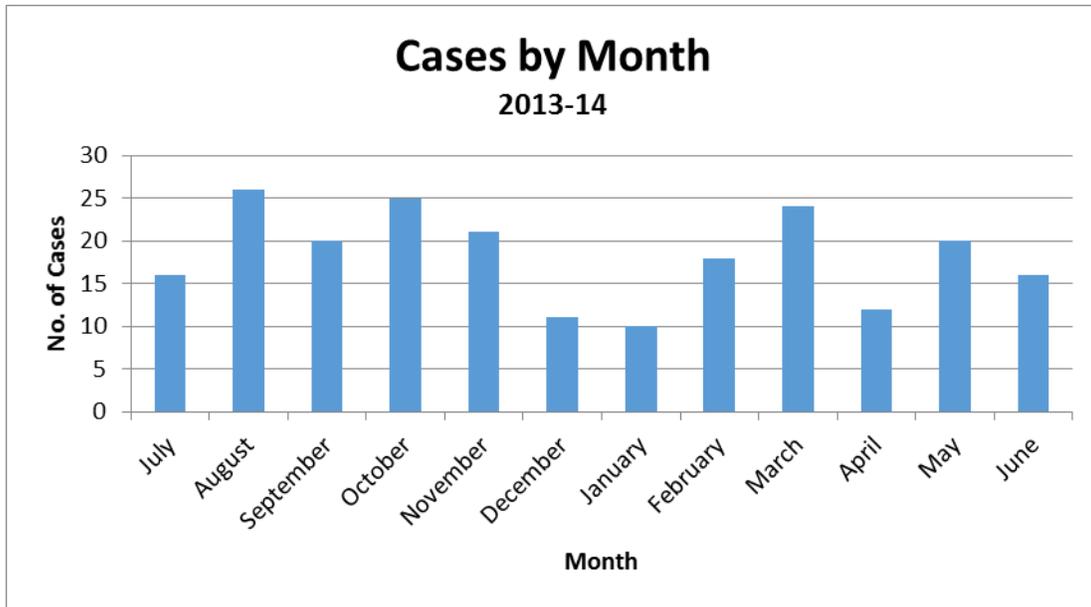


Figure 2: Ombuds cases by month

**Nature of Visitors and Contacts.** Ombuds offices typically refer to those seeking services as ‘visitors’ rather than clients. This term is used to distinguish ombuds’ services from those that are based on advocacy and alignment with the party or parties involved. The majority of visitors to the Ombuds Office in 2013-14 were females (53%). This represents a decrease from 67% in the previous year. Sixty-nine per cent of visitors sought ombuds’ assistance on their own initiative, and approximately one third (31%) were referred by others (administrators, supervisors, advisors, HR and coworkers/peers). The modest increase in self-referrals is best attributed to the ongoing campus-wide efforts to promote awareness and understanding of the Ombuds Office.

**Affiliation/Constituency.** The Ombuds Office provides services to all faculty, staff and students of the university. The ‘Other’ category includes temporary help, consultants and, with limited services, retirees, former students, student/employment applicants and visitors, as long as an issue pertains to a current experience with the university. In academic settings, case affiliation is tied to the party initiating an individual case. The affiliation of each party within a case is not currently gathered or reported. Table 1 shows the distribution of cases based on the initiators’ university affiliation. Visitor affiliations continued to represent proportions similar to their respective numbers among employee categories, and they remained largely consistent with normal fluctuations in previous years. The largest increase in usage from last year was in cases initiated by tenure-track faculty, which accounted for 20% of cases in 2013-14 as compared to 14% in 2012-13. Sixteen cases were initiated by undergraduate students during the year and remained fairly consistent with 18 cases for the previous year. No trends or patterns were identified for any of these fluctuations (see table 1).

**Table 1: Affiliation by Percentage of Cases**

Affiliation	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
	%	%	%	%	%
Classified Staff	35	37	34	34	37
Faculty (tenure track)	18	15	22	14	20
Faculty (non-tenure track)	3	2	0	1	1
Administrator	15	18	17	11	9
Exempt	9	13	13	18	19
Graduate Assistants (TA/RA)	3	2	0	2	0
Graduate Students	4	7	4	5	3
Undergraduates	6	3	6	9	7
Retiree	1	0	1	0	0
Other	6	8	2	3	4

Seventy-five per cent of cases in 2013-14 directly involved one person. This figure indicates that for these cases there were no other parties presenting the concern or who were *directly* involved with addressing the problem, although in most cases there was at least one other person of concern. This percentage is typical for most ombuds' offices. The remaining cases involved multiple parties who were directly involved in the problem. Among these cases, two-party cases continued to be most common (Table 2).

[Note: When responding to unit or department-wide cases the number of 'parties' counted for reporting purposes was determined by the degree to which the ombuds was *directly* involved with individual parties and does not reflect the actual number of persons within the unit. In many instances, services provided to entire units or departments (such as when serving as a neutral, facilitation or training) involved much larger numbers than included below (ranging from approximately 4-58 persons).]

**Table 2: Number of Individuals (Parties) per Ombuds Case**

Individuals Involved	No. of Cases	Total Parties
1	165	165
2	36	72
3	9	27
4	3	12
5	2	10
7	2	14
10	1	10
14	1	14
<b>Total Parties/Individuals</b>		<b>324</b>

Seventy-nine per cent of cases were delivered through face-to-face consultation, which is encouraged whenever possible. Face-to-face consultations remained the preferred contact option, and visitors routinely expressed appreciation for the opportunity to discuss concerns and explore options in a personal, confidential and helpful manner. Visitors often cited this as being one of the most helpful features of the

Ombuds Office. The use of video call consultation for non-Moscow-based or traveling parties continued to be used whenever face-to-face consultation was not feasible or timely; and visitors expressed satisfaction for having this option available. This year 17% of cases were addressed through telephone-only consultations. Email or other written modes of communication (letters, notes, etc.), although highly discouraged due to confidentiality concerns, accounted for 3% of cases.

Cases vary significantly in the amount of ombuds involvement needed; this involvement is reported as 'number of contacts.' Twelve percent of cases involved only one visit or contact with no further ombuds/visitor/other direct involvement. This single contact may involve several hours of consultation and brief follow-up activities. The remaining cases involved multiple consultations or contacts, either with the visitor alone (the person bringing the case) and/or with others involved, such as with multi-party mediations or with those who were essential resources for addressing concerns (e.g., administrators, supervisors, General Counsel, Human Resources, Human Rights, Access and Inclusion, etc.). The number of contacts for 2013-14 was 795 and represents a substantial increase from 667 contacts the previous year. While differences in presenting issues and the number of contacts needed usually account for normal year-to-year fluctuations, 2013-14 seemed to be a year of numerous complex issues requiring more ombuds involvement. Table 3 shows the distribution of contacts per case.

**Table 3: Number of Contacts per Case**

No. of Ombuds Contacts	No. of Cases	Total No. Contacts
1	26	26
2	58	116
3	45	135
4	40	160
5	13	65
6	10	60
7	10	70
8	7	56
9	5	45
11	1	11
12	2	24
13	1	13
14	1	14
<b>Total Contacts</b>		<b>795</b>

***Nature of Problems.***

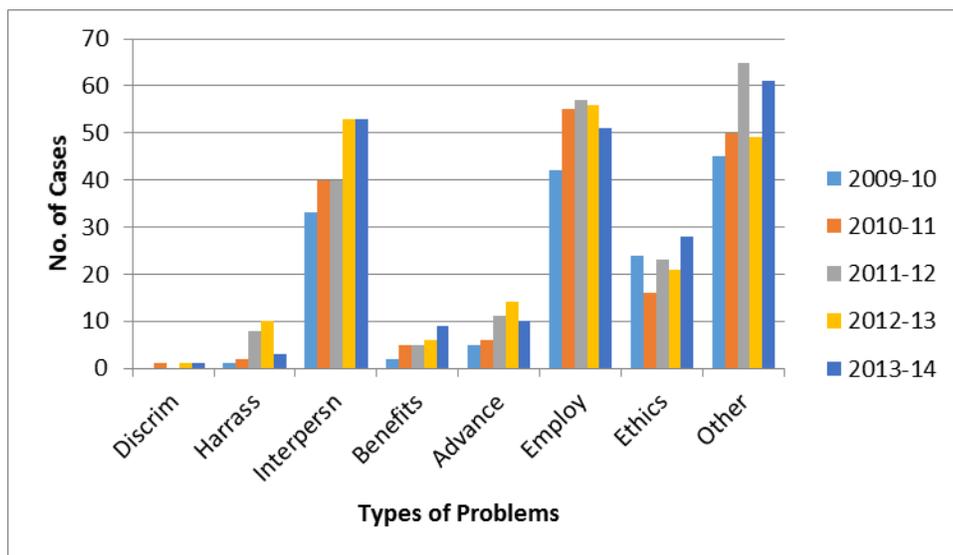
Recognizing that every organization will have concerns or problems that emerge within the normal process of conducting business, the University of Idaho provides multiple resources in addition to the Ombuds Office to help members of the community address their issues and problems constructively. It is the confidential, informal and impartial features of the Ombuds Office that most often prompt visitors to seek ombuds' services, especially as an initial resource. While contact with the Ombuds Office is confidential, issues are tracked. Noting the *nature* of problems presented to the Ombuds Office can inform the university of areas requiring attention. Most fluctuations in the number of cases among the types of problems in 2013-14 were not

*"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"*

*"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to."*

*Lewis Carroll*

surprising and did not reflect new patterns or trends. Figure 3 shows the distribution of problem categories received by the Ombuds Office in 2013-14. Each category is then discussed in greater detail.



**Figure 3: Problem type by year brought to the Ombuds Office**

**Discrimination:** There was one case of religious discrimination brought directly to the Ombuds Office during 2013-14. There were again cases in which individuals were referred to the Ombuds Office for follow-up assistance with non-discrimination issues *after* their issues were assessed for discrimination. The low number of discrimination cases brought to the Ombuds Office in recent years, suggests that members of university community are well-informed about the formal channels for addressing discrimination issues.

**Harassment:** Most incidents of harassment perceived as due to age, disability, race/ethnicity/origin, religion and sex made their way directly to the appropriate formal office. Three cases of harassment came to the Ombuds Office. One case involving religious harassment and one case involving sexual harassment were referred to the appropriate formal office.

The one remaining harassment case pertained to general harassment or ‘bullying’, which is a decrease from the six complaints of bullying in the previous year. Whenever perceptions of ‘bullying’ are present, they are often accompanied by strong emotional intensity, and at times, concerns about personal safety and professional/reputational security. Despite these risks, fear of retaliation often leads some visitors to choose inaction over actively reporting and addressing such behavior.

**Benefits:** There were nine cases during the year attributed to benefit issues. Four cases were related to sick/annual leave, and three cases involved student health insurance issues. One other case involved administrative leave and a final case was related to travel.

**Advancement:** Of the ten cases related to advancement, half of the cases involved concerns about salary. Perceptions of salary inequities and complaints of significant disparities among

pay increases were at the heart of these issues. Promotion/tenure and non-reappointment issues accounted for most of the remaining advancement cases. While salary was the *specified* presenting complaint in these five cases, salary disparity and perceived inequity issues were *frequent and contributed to tensions* in many of the other categories.

**Employment:** Employment is the largest problem category with 25 ‘specifiers’ or specific areas of concern; and as such, it continues to be the largest category of problems brought to the Ombuds Office. There were 51 cases that fell into this category in 2013-14, which decreased minimally from the previous year. For 2013-14, the most frequent specifier within the employment category, and the specifier with the greatest increase--up 10 cases--was ‘job description’ with 13 cases. Nearly all complaints were about job classification changes, titles, salary bands and disparities between positions and in and between units. ‘Hiring process’ was another area of significant complaint, increasing by four cases over the previous year. Specifically, complaints involved the hiring process used for some positions. On a positive note, management complaints were significantly lower than the previous year. Evaluation complaints, which are commonly one of the higher employment problem specifiers, remained consistent with the preceding year, with eight cases. With the exception of the job description and hiring categories small shifts in the numbers of cases among other specifiers, did not reflect any trends. The number of cases in each specifier or subcategory is shown in Table 4 along with the change from last year.

**Table 4: Breakdown of Cases in ‘Employment’ Category**

	Change from last			Change from last	
	Cases	year		Cases	year
Evaluations	8	-1	Accommodations for Disability	0	0
Management	4	-7	Assistantship Appointment	1	0
Job Description	13	+10	Demotion	1	+1
Reassignment	0	-2	Hiring Interview	0	0
Probation (performance)	2	-6	Marital Issues	0	0
Working Conditions	2	0	Office Space/Conditions	0	0
Workload	5	+1	Program Termination	0	-1
Flex time/Location	0	0	Scheduling	2	+1
Resignation	3	-1	Teaching Load/Course Assign.	2	+1
Salary	1	+1	Termination – Layoff	0	-1
Hiring Process	4	+4	Termination – Performance	0	0
Reclassification	0	0	Termination – Cause	3	+1
Reorganization	0	-6			

Although some of the categories listed above show zero, it does not mean that the topic was not part of any visitor’s reason for using the Ombuds Office.

**Interpersonal:** Interpersonal conflicts are predictable within any organization, and with 53 cases in 2013-14, it was the highest category of cases received by the office. This number sustains the significant increase reported in the previous year. Tensions and disputes between individuals in the workplace and in the learning environment ranged from singular incidences, to persistent annoyances between individuals, some of which became intensely disruptive and distressful and impacted multiple parties and non-parties (co-workers, supervisors, etc.). The year's cases involved perceptions of incivility, reputational insults, hurtful, offensive or mis-communication, and, in some cases, intentional intrusion or interference. Interpersonal disputes between a member of the university and 'Others' (visitors, non-students, parents, employee applicants, etc.) increased by six cases for a total of 12 cases. Interpersonal cases where the other party was a faculty member (in their faculty role) increased by only two cases to nine cases this year. This small increase reflects no pattern or trend. Of the 53 interpersonal dispute cases received, the visitor's dispute directly involved one or more individuals in the categories below:

Administrator	3 cases
Co-worker	9
Supervisor	11
Supervisee	7
Faculty	9
Student	2
Others	12

(temporary help, non-student, former student, job applicants, parent, etc.)

**Ethical Concerns:** There were 28 cases involving ethical concerns during the reporting year. This represents a 33% increase over last year. Consistent with the previous year, concern for health and safety on campus—and the responsibility to bring potential problems to the university's attention--continues to be strongly felt across the university. Twelve cases involved a range of health and safety concerns, including alcohol and drug use, mental health concerns, threatening, angry or volatile behavior, and anticipated changes in the firearms policy. Of the 11 cases counted under the 'Other' specifier, some examples of those complaints include perceived inappropriate processes used during formal meetings or in the process of decision-making, conduct during meetings, breeches of confidentiality (inappropriate disclosure of confidential information), inappropriate discussion (influencing), university investigation process/report, retaliation, and disclosure of job/offer. There are eight specifiers in the ethical concerns category; actual cases were distributed only in the following areas:

Authorship	1
Deception/misrepresentation/theft	2
Health/safety	12
Records management	2
Other	11

**Other:** Visits to the Ombuds Office frequently involve multiple issues. However, for data management purposes, only the *predominant* or *precipitating* reason for contact is used. As such, many categories could have much larger numbers or may not be

counted as zero. On the other hand, some cases defy placement in *any* of the established categories. These cases are recorded as “*Other*” and are shown below.

Sixty-one cases did not fit into the defined major categories. The most significant change, and one worth noting, is the increase in cases relating to unit-wide or department function. In 2013-14 there were 11 cases presented with issues relating primarily to this problem type as compared to four cases in the preceding year. Some concerns were brought directly to the Ombuds Office by the unit administrator, and others were brought forward by one or more members of a department or unit or on behalf of their unit. Unit-wide cases are often complex, require considerable time to work through, and have a significant impact on the individuals or groups involved. Unit-wide problems were often related to leadership/management expectations or changes, conflicting priorities, personality differences or interpersonal upsets. Many such issues are long-standing and seemingly intractable. While it is not always possible to remedy all of the issues within distressed groups, often interventions helped to restore the function of the unit and prevent further escalation or deterioration. Examples of ‘Other’ case issues for 2013-14 include: return-to-work, department incivility, morale/discouragement, problems with major professor, communication, professional boundaries, policy questions, and leadership coaching. General descriptions within the ‘other’ category, along with the number of cases, are shown below.

	Number of Cases	Change
Department/unit function	11	+7
Committee function	2	0
Academic issues	13	-3
Department head (misc. problems)	3	0
Disciplinary action	9	+3
Financial aid	1	0
Facilitation (case-related)	1	-2
Training (case-related)	1	-1
Miscellaneous	20	+8

**Resolution of Problems.** Ombuds use a variety of processes to assist visitors with addressing concerns and resolving problems. Most cases involve multiple actions, so categories are *not* mutually exclusive. The types of ombuds’ actions taken once again remained fairly consistent with previous years, with the exception of information (providing information on policy, university resources, procedures, etc.), which decreased from the previous year. Four basic categories of ombuds’ actions are summarized in Table 5.

**Table 5: Actions Used by Ombuds**

Action	Cases	Percentage of Cases*
Problem exploration	211	96
Information	132	60
Intercession (e.g., mediation, shuttle diplomacy, facilitation)	56	26
Referrals (e.g., EAP, HR, Human Rights, Access and Inclusion, deans, supervisors, advisors)	108	49

\*Most cases involve multiple actions, so categories are *not* mutually exclusive and therefore exceed 100%.

**Outreach and Other Services.** In addition to providing direct problem resolution services to members of the university community, the Ombuds Office also contributes to Goal Four: Community and Culture of the university's Strategic Plan 2011-2015 in multiple ways.

*New Employee Orientation.* During 2013-14 all new university employees attending New Employee Orientation were introduced to the Ombuds Office role and resources at monthly employee orientation sessions. These brief presentations not only served to inform employees about university problem solving and conflict resolution resources, but also introduced and emphasized the university's cultural values and commitment to providing a safe, respectful and satisfying workplace. During each of these sessions, the ombuds reached out to new employees and invited them to visit or contact the ombuds to briefly follow up on their initial experience and progress with the university. In response, approximately 23 employees followed up individually either by coming to the office or by engaging the ombuds in conversations on campus or during visits to off-campus sites. These informal follow-up contacts are not included in the annual data as cases. New employees who were encountering problems were identified and provided timely assistance, and these contacts are represented as contacts. While these activities take time, the early opportunity to establish a positive relationship with new employees and address any problems early on have demonstrated positive impacts.

*Employee and Student Development.* The ombuds was once again called upon to provide employee professional development, departmental in-service trainings and presentations to academic classes and student groups. These sessions covered various human relations topics and skills focused on civility, interpersonal communication, conflict management, change, collaboration and group work. Throughout the year, the ombuds provided nine professional development/training sessions (not case-related) totaling 16 presentation hours. Additionally, the ombuds facilitated two unit workflow mapping sessions and two statewide university question and answer sessions (classification system forums), and served as a neutral/process observer for three specialized committees (post-tenure review, promotion and tenure, and search committees) to support respectful and constructive dialogue and established process.

*University Service.* The ombuds engaged in service to the broader university through continuing participation on the Benefits Advisory Group, and the Professional Development Coordinating Committee.

*Professional Service.* The ombuds is actively involved with the ongoing development of the organizational ombudsman profession and the International Ombudsman Association (IOA). In 2013-14 the ombuds was elected to and served on the IOA Board of Directors, served as chair of the Membership Committee and with the Leadership Coordinating Group. The ombuds presented/co-presented two concurrent sessions at the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) annual conference in Denver, CO, Due Diligence: Safety and Security in the Ombuds Office and was a panelist for Spirituality, Faith and Ombudsing.

*Professional Development.* The ombuds is committed to continuous professional development and engaged regularly in reflective practice with other experienced academic ombuds through video conferencing and telephonic consultation. The ombuds participated in six hours of professional development during the IOA annual conference (Infusing Positive Psychology During the Conflict Transformation Process, Mapping Ombudsman Conversations, Understanding Conflict Causation and Escalation, Promoting a Respectful Workplace). Other professional development included: Thomas Kilman Conflict Style Inventory seminar, Mental Health First Aid, QPR Suicide Prevention, Assessing and Managing Suicide Risk, UI Diversity Symposium, and Transgender 101. Additionally, the ombuds completed 33 hours of continuing mental health education in maintenance of her professional counselor license. Much of this continuing education content is relevant and helpful to ombuds practice.

*Safety/Security Audit.* In light of the responsibility to provide the safest environment possible in which to offer problem solving and conflict resolution services, the ombuds requested a safety audit of the Ombuds Office by a campus police officer.

**Effectiveness of the Ombuds Office.** Being heard and understood is a powerful intervention. Visitors to the Ombuds Office frequently report how valuable it is to them—even when no resolution options or remedies are available—to have a ‘safe’ place and an impartial person in which to share their concerns. Being able to ‘do their thinking out loud’ without judgment or fear and being assisted with sorting out issues and response options is the most common and highly appreciated benefit reported directly to the ombuds and in written feedback. When solutions or resolutions are available or achieved, many of those directly and indirectly involved report that they: are better able to focus on their work or studies, are relieved to experience improvements in their workplace and learning environments, and have successfully repaired important relationships. It continues to be generally much easier and more satisfying for all parties to resolve issues informally before issues escalate, whenever possible.

Assessing benefits and overall effectiveness, impacts and outcomes of ombuds services poses a challenge for ombuds offices. Results are difficult to measure or report since confidentiality precludes the use of many of the usual forms of evaluation, and visitor perceptions of outcomes are often tied to factors outside of an ombuds’ role (an ombuds cannot reverse decisions, change a grade, or adjudicate complaints, etc.). Helping visitors and all parties to be effective, constructive, fair and respectful in seeking solutions to their concerns, reducing harmful tensions or hostility, and thereby contributing to the overall well-being of the university community, is considered a successful outcome in the perspective of the Ombuds Office.

The Ombuds Office uses two methods to assess the outcomes and impacts of services. The first is based on the ombuds’ self-analysis of completed cases using a scale ranging between ‘satisfactory’ and ‘unsatisfactory’ resolution of cases; it is not a measure of visitor satisfaction but is used as an element of reflective practice. The scale attempts to help the ombuds evaluate the outcome and impact of each case as objectively as possible. Table 6 describes the outcome identifiers that fall within each range and that are used to guide the ombuds’ appraisal.

For 2013-14, the ombuds’ self-appraisal of case outcomes placed 86% of case outcomes within a range considered ‘resolved satisfactorily.’ Thirteen percent of cases fell within the ‘neutral’ outcome range, and approximately one per cent were considered ‘unsatisfactory’ outcomes. The sizeable number of cases gauged to be positive outcomes reflects the ombuds’ observation that working through an issue or problem with an impartial skilled listener, developing a broader perspective on the problem, identifying relevant policies and procedures, developing constructive response options and having difficult conversations mediated, generally contributed to more positive and less destructive outcomes in most issues, even when a visitor or the university’s irrevocable actions have already occurred. Despite not attaining a full resolution, an adverse situation that stabilizes and does not decline further, may still be considered a satisfactory or, at the least, neutral outcome. The ombuds self-appraisal of cases for 2013-14 is summarized in Table 6 (due to rounding, subcategories do not add up to 100%).

**Table 6: Self-Appraisal of Outcomes/Impacts Ombuds Cases, 2013-14**

Outcome Category	Percentage of Cases (N=219)
<b>Resolved satisfactorily with Ombuds Office assistance</b>	<b>86%</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreement/compromise reached through mediation; formal action avoided; visitor given another chance or situation otherwise satisfactorily resolved. 6%</li> <li>• Conflict resolved short of mediation; may involve ‘shuttle diplomacy’ or similar intervention, workshops with entire unit, or other techniques; formal action not taken. 13%</li> <li>• Ombuds served, by invitation or suggestion, as neutral observer; may involve role as moderator, but not mediator; party(ies) satisfied with outcome; formal action not taken. 3%</li> <li>• Information only was provided by Ombuds; and/or helps party to self-advocate; visitor satisfied. 60 %</li> <li>• Action resulted in policy or system modification/improvement 1%</li> <li>• Other 3%</li> </ul>	
<b>Neutral Outcome (Ombuds Office had no direct impact)</b>	<b>13%</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ombud’s role was primarily as a neutral listener; little or no ‘coaching’ or additional information was provided. Visitor already had or did not need information, but needed ‘someone to listen;’ may have received confirmation of ideas/plans, but nothing new added by Ombuds. 11%</li> <li>• Visitor initiated and then canceled or ‘vanished’ after setting appointment or before follow-up action was completed. 0%</li> <li>• Situation ‘unrepairable’ upon arrival (e.g. temporary help, already terminated, tenure was denied for appropriate reason, or visitor resigned). 1%</li> <li>• Other &lt;1%</li> </ul>	
<b>Results Unsatisfactory</b>	<b>1%</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visitor disgruntled with Ombuds efforts and discontinued visits or contacts. 0%</li> <li>• Visitor disregarded advice/solution and suffered consequences. &lt;1%</li> <li>• Unfair practice or situation not resolved nor corrected due to lack of cooperation. &lt;1%</li> <li>• Other 0%</li> </ul>	

**Ombuds Office Visitor Feedback Form.** The Ombuds Office provides a voluntary opportunity for visitors to provide anonymous feedback on services and outcomes. While the feedback form provides general information on the ombuds’ effectiveness and visitor satisfaction, the instrument was designed primarily to support the ombuds’ continuous improvement and is not intended as a formal outcomes measure. Use of visitor satisfaction and outcomes assessments pose known challenges, including consistently lower than desired evaluation return rates, and an understanding that a visitor’s role in the case as well as their expected or desired outcomes likely influence perceptions. Despite these and other known limitations, such feedback is welcome and useful, especially when paired with the ombuds’ self-appraisal of outcomes and impacts, and contributes to strengthening the delivery of services.

The Ombuds Office ensures the anonymity of the responding party, and no identifying information is requested on the feedback form. Visitors receive feedback forms at case closure and send their completed forms directly to the Office of the President for processing by a staff member assigned to manage administrative evaluations. A feedback summary report is reviewed with the ombuds as a part of the

annual performance evaluation process. Feedback summaries are based on the calendar year and not synchronized with the periods covered by the annual report.

While the intent is to receive feedback from all initiating case visitors, these efforts are not always successful. Some cases do not always have a defined endpoint, some visitors choose not to participate, some have left the university or are otherwise difficult to contact, and others simply lose track of mailing in their forms, despite communicating their best intentions. Despite a low return rate, those received were positive overall and most comments reaffirmed that ombuds' services are a helpful and valued university resource.

### **Visitor feedback form comments...**

- *My meeting was very helpful! I now have great tools to better address my issue in the workplace. I feel I can now do this in a professional, respectful manner.*
- *This was my first experience speaking with Ellen on an issue. She was extremely helpful and gave me really good advice on how to approach an issue.*
- *I was on the verge of almost complete burn-out and was seriously thinking about becoming a barista. I received so much insight into how to ask for what I need and figuring out what that is!*
- *My concerns were multi-dimensional, complex, and very sensitive. The Ombuds addressed my issues very effectively.*
- *This is the second time/issue that I have come to the Ombuds. I returned because of positive/helpful experience and it helps me learn skills needed to approach workplace challenges effectively. So helpful!*
- *... She gives straight forward advice with examples. My situation seems so much more manageable after talking to her.*
- *Very nice to deal with. Just didn't have many specific answers for me.*
- *Our Ombuds is an invaluable resource. I have returned to her for advice and know that I can do so again at any time in the future.*

### **Ombuds Observations and Comments**

In the spirit of continuous improvement and in accordance with the provisions of the *Faculty-Staff Handbook* FSH 3820 B-6 (FSH), the ombuds may identify issues that might warrant further attention, and make recommendations, when appropriate.

*The ombuds are encouraged to comment on policies, procedures and processes with an eye to positive future change. These observations should be shared with the administrators and bodies with jurisdiction over those policies, procedures, and processes. (FSH 3820 B-6)*

Most concerns or problems brought to the Ombuds Office, are situational, or specific to a set of circumstances or individuals rather than emerging from systemic problems. However, when issues *are* specific to a systemic issue within a particular responsibility area, they are brought directly to the attention of the respective administrator for immediate attention. On other occasions, the ombuds' may share observations, perceptions, and offer additional comment, or highlight opportunities for improvement. Selected ombuds observations, perceptions and comments for 2013-14 are noted below:

**New employee classification system.** Numerous comments and concerns as well as complaints regarding the new employee classification system were brought to the ombuds' attention, both in anticipation of the roll out as well as after the fact. Before the presentation of the new system, some employees questioned the motivation for the change; and when problems within the new classification system surfaced, that uncertainty gave way to hurt, anger and distrust. It was a particularly painful time for many employees. In retrospect, it is worth asking, "What worked?" Despite continuing dissatisfaction over some classification categories, the ombuds heard, nevertheless, from many employees that they appreciated the administration's consideration of and responsiveness to their concerns.

**Leave reporting practices.** Inconsistencies in leave reporting practices was one area of systemic focus during the year. There were multiple and recurring complaints involving different units that related to sick and annual leave reporting practices for exempt employees. These issues contributed to considerable personal and workplace distress and dissatisfaction. This problem was recently addressed, and hopefully, fully resolved by means of a recent campus-wide clarification and reaffirmation of university policy. This corrective action is appreciated.

**Salary/wage increases.** Multiple complaints were received, and others were (and continue to be) openly expressed across the university, about perceived disparities in pay raises over the most recent and previous few years. Differences in raises (when comparing percent of raises) ranged from nominal to significant among units, positions and some like positions. This has been confusing, at best, and at worst, it is a significant source of dissatisfaction. Clarifying and communicating the processes that ensure fair and equitable distribution of raises is essential.

**Employee wellbeing. (continuing issue)** Over the year, an increased number of employees have reported significant problems of well-being related to workplace and work life concerns. An increased number of employees in the past years also voiced concerns about what they perceived to be signs of distress among some of their coworkers.

**Workplace culture and climate (continuing issue).** Although the ombuds observes progress in this area, especially within some units, there is a continuing opportunity for the university to help prevent unnecessary discord by better communicating its expectations for professional conduct to all members of the community and by establishing clear processes for responding to persistent uncivil behavior. Uncivil behaviors that are left unaddressed are inconsistent with the university's expressed values and set an improper standard for the workplace and for students.

## **The Year Ahead**

The Ombuds Office will continue to provide a confidential, informal and impartial place for all members of the university community to bring university-related concerns and get help with resolving them. The ombuds will expand outreach efforts off-campus to introduce new employees, supervisors, administrators and students located away from the Moscow campus to the Ombuds Office and its services. The ombuds will also continue to actively reach out to new supervisors and administrators, student leadership, residence life staff, and student groups on campus. The ombuds will continue to partner with Professional Development and Learning (PDL) to provide workshops on communication, change, conflict management and support supervisor training and development; and the ombuds invites requests for onsite in-service training, meeting support and facilitation. The ombuds welcomes opportunities to provide preventative and early problem consultations as well as problem management for more advanced issues.